



# Handbook for Actors Auditioning at SETC State Screening Conventions

Endorsed by the Professional Division and Audition Committee of the Southeastern Theatre Conference.

## **What Does SETC Look For?**

There are a wide variety of theatres and production companies in attendance at the annual Southeastern Theatre Conference convention -- the largest gathering of its kind in the country. Generally, there are between 90-110 theatres present seeking actors and actor/technicians. Additionally 100+ theatres are looking for designers, technicians, managers, interns and apprentices. Regional auditions are typically held in a large ballroom in a convention hotel, with representatives from the theatres furiously writing notes, talking, reading resumes and looking for talent to fit their season casting requirements. As an actor, it is impossible to appease everyone in your limited amount of audition time at the general audition -- from which callbacks to specific theatres and companies are posted.

On the whole, these casting representatives know it is impossible to satisfy their specific demands in the general audition. So what might be a common denominator that all the theatres would be seeking? Perhaps they are looking for a combination of professional demeanor, confidence, talent, realistic judgment of your abilities, and a visceral "love of the stage." If these elements of your acting are clearly read by everyone in the audition hall, you will more than likely increase your chances of getting called back. It may be assumed that it is in the callback the particular theatre's specific casting requirements are tested.

## **What Are The Adjudicators Looking For at the State Screenings?**

The three Adjudicators (one from the host state, one representative from the professional division of SETC, and one is an SETC/Audition Committee representative) basically look at four components of your acting: emotional accessibility, vocalization, physicalization, and professional comportment. They will rate you numerically (1-7/lowest to highest) in various categories. State officials will add up the three Adjudicator's scores for an overall total. Since there is a strict time limit to the audition, overtime will result in the officials deducting three points from your overall score.

SETC has an allotted quota of actors which each state may send to the spring conference. They will rank the top scores until the slots are filled. The following criteria for the four categories are drawn directly from the "Guidelines for Adjudicators" handbook:

\*ACTING ABILITY (i.e. emotional accessibility and believability). You [The Adjudicator] are looking for heightened realism in the acting. You must believe the character's emotional world. As a prominent artistic director once said, "... you must not have too much or too little energy for the honest acting task."

\*COMMUNICATION SKILLS (i.e. vocalization and articulation) The actor must articulate well, make the material audible and understandable, and use healthy vocal technique as required by the material.

\*MOVEMENT (i.e. physicalization) The actor must physicalize through the space as required by the material. Use of the available acting space, gestures, etc. should grow organically out of the actor's performance.

\*STAGE PRESENCE (i.e. personal & professional comportment). You are looking for professional attitude and comportment from the actor. This includes behavior and dress that would work favorably for them in a professional audition situation. For example, do they appear nervous? Did they fumble lines? How well do they conduct their introduction, conclusion, work, relationship to the accompanist and/or you? Do they exude confidence and a strong stage persona? And most important, are they responsibly prepared?

The following information is designed to assist you in meeting these guidelines.  
Read through it carefully.

### **Your Material**

1. Because of the 60/90-second time limitation, choose the length of your material accordingly:

A. If you are Acting or Singing Only, plan on approximately 45 seconds of material (not including your name and # introduction and a "thank you" at the end).

B. If you are Acting & Singing, plan on about 75-80 seconds of material (not including your introduction and a "thank you" at end); this allows you some adjustment time for you and the accompanist. Remember, time "expands" when you are performing and you won't want to rush your introduction/thanks or important emotional moments in the material.

2. Choose material that will flatter you and exhibit your marketability. All of your prepared audition material should fit neatly in the middle range (or "wheelhouse") of your abilities. Try to portray a character written within your age and emotional range.

3. Avoid overly-climactic or passive/intimate material. You do not have enough time to develop high peaks or intense intimacy. Actively involve yourself in overcoming obstacles in order to achieve your emotionally-based objective/need/intention. Finally, beware unknown or obscure pieces, especially those that have never been produced under stringent critical review – there's a reason the material is obscure – it's usually bad writing.

4. Remember that sexually explicit or "socially-offensive" material will more often than not work against you. Since many of the theatres at SETC have conservative audience bases, you may "type" yourself out of callbacks simply by the selection of your material. This material may create a level of discomfort and embarrassment with the auditionors and therefore could work against you no matter how effective you believe your audition to be; this kind of material could be perceived as "narrowing" your acting range and would not flatter you in a large, general audition such as SETC.

5. Material that demands "typed" and provocative characterizations or dialects are strongly discouraged; Adjudicators and casting directors won't know who YOU are if they are trying to see past a dialect or character traits that are not organically yours.

6. If you can't sing, don't. If you cannot hold pitch, don't sing. It wastes your time and the auditionor's time and may exhibit you in a bad light. However, if you possess a good "back-row chorus" singing voice, it may indeed be a good idea to sing at the state audition and the SETC regionals as it will enhance your marketability; about 75% of the theatres

represented at SETC are looking for varying degrees of singing talent. If you opt to sing, choose music and a character that is in your age and vocal range. DO NOT SHOW OFF YOUR RANGE UNLESS YOU HAVE A SOLID RANGE TO SHOW OFF! Otherwise, find material that is in your "wheelhouse" and give a good confident reading of your singing voice. Also, run your score by an accompanist -- if it is too tough to play and/or sight-read (most Bernstein or Sondheim, for example), this could be detrimental to your audition. Also detrimental and difficult to sight-read for an accompanist are "lead-sheets" or score sheets from chorus books -- it is best to get a complete piano score for your song. Transposed scores can also work against you unless they are professionally and clearly transcribed. The accompanist will not transpose for you on the spot. Use common sense: don't do or present anything that will jeopardize your creative relationship with the accompanist. This short selection of music for the state audition/SETC should be music and lyrics you love and that you are absolutely confident singing. In other words, sing what you sing best -- don't worry about showing off the absolute limits of your range or that perfect vibrato -- why push it? -- the Adjudicators will know immediately if you are a savvy singer -- and whether you are a principal or chorus singer. In general, if you are not 100% confident in your singing, either as a chorus or principal singer, do not sing -- there is too much quality competition and you don't want anyone doubting your creative judgment.

### **Your Preparation**

You should prepare for the following audition protocol at the state audition and SETC:

1. The explanation of your score to the accompanist (if you are singing)
2. Your entrance and "centering" yourself
3. Announcement of Name and Number
4. A beat (transition from you to the character)
5. Presentation of your material
6. A beat (transition from character to you; or if you're singing, from character to character)
  - (6A) Singing (Note: You may sing first and then switch to monologue)
  - (6B) A beat -- from singing character to you
7. "Thank You" and your name and number
8. Exit

1. If you are singing, you will need to prepare yourself along the following lines:

A. The score needs to be easily readable by the accompanist; If you are singing after your monologue, the last two lines of your speech should be boldly printed at the top of the page. Any deviation from the printed musical score should be clearly marked. The score should also be mounted on something stiff: cardboard, manila folder, etc. so it does not fall down while being played. The accompanist should not have to turn pages.

B. The accompanist needs to be your best friend during those 16 or so bars. If you are singing, you will be communicating with the accompanist during the audition in progress ahead of you. Be friendly and introduce yourself, be very clear communicating your preferred tempo and anything else that completely familiarizes the accompanist to your music. It is a good idea to quietly speak or sing a line or two in tempo; just beating it out with your hand could prove unreliable as nerves could vary the tempo once you're singing. Remember, the accompanist follows you. Assume nothing -- the more specific you are, the greater the chance of having a rewarding collaboration for your song. The reason this explanation is under the "Preparation" category is that you need to rehearse your communication to the accompanist so it is second-nature and you do not have to worry about forgetting anything important immediately prior to your audition.

2. Your entrance will include walking to center stage, placing or removing a chair if so desired, "centering" yourself and waiting in a relaxed and confident manner for the Adjudicators to finish commenting on and scoring the previous audition. At SETC, you will not have to wait as there are no Adjudicators – you will follow immediately on the heels of the actor before you.

3. Your introduction will include establishing eye contact with the Adjudicators and "slating in" your name and number. It may also include a greeting such as "hello" or "hi" or "good morning," etc. For example, "Hi, my name is Pat Smith, number 155." Time begins the moment you start speaking -- this means with your introduction -- not the text/material. (secs 1-4)

4. Take a short beat to separate you (your introduction) and your character. You may wish to find or establish a scene partner or become specific with your character's emotional world in this "air" before you speak. (Another good time to find and establish your scene partner might be in the "waiting period" in #2 above) (secs. 5-6)

5. The presentation of your material is, of course, the foundation of your audition. In accordance with the Adjudicator's guidelines, your character should be believable in its active emotional world, you should be audible and understood, your movement should fit the emotional context of the material, and you should exude a confidence and compelling presence on stage. (secs. 7-45)

6. Again, on completion of the material, take a beat to establish the separation between the character and you. Establish eye contact with the Adjudicators. (secs. 45-47)

6A. If you're singing, the accompanist will most likely begin playing your music right on the heels of your last line (which, if you remember, you have printed on the score) unless you tell the accompanist otherwise. It is your option to take a beat before you sing -- if you do, be sure to tell the accompanist how you will signal them to begin (a nod of the head, eye contact, etc.). Sing your material. (secs 48-80)

6B. Take a beat. See (6) above. (secs 80-82) Note: If you wish to sing first, simply reverse #'s 4-6A above.

7. Say "thank you" and state your name and number again. Be sure to center yourself and try not to diffuse your introduction and your thank you with superfluous movement (for example, don't begin to exit and say your name and number while exiting). (secs. 47-52 for 60- second auditions/82-86 for 90-second auditions)

8. Exit back to your seat via the piano to pick up your music if you sang. Thank the accompanist. Remember that you are constantly being watched and observed. If you exhibit poor attitude toward yourself or someone else, it will affect your score and marketability.

Above all, when you rehearse for the audition, you should rehearse the ENTIRE PRESENTATION. Think of your audition as one package with several components -- not just the "all-important" material. Make sure you do not blur the components -- exhibit clean and specific shifts and transitions between the elements of the audition.

### **Your Presentation**

1. Be sure to warm up -- preferably arriving early enough to acclimate yourself to the actual audition space. Test acoustics and walk through your "package" several times. Find out as much as you can about the audition protocol, the space, the Adjudicators, the sound of the piano, etc. so that you feel at home during the course of the day.

2. Dress comfortably and in clothes that flatter you. It could work against you if you dress sloppily ("doesn't this person care what they look like?") or too formally ("is this actor too uptight?"). Your hair should never hide your facial features. Remember, first impressions are the strongest impressions and how you look, dress, and comport yourself will most

likely be perceived as an indication of what kind of actor you are. It is not at all sexist (in fact it's an integral part of the business) to convey that women should show the line of their bodies, especially the legs with character/heel shoes and skirts. Men should show the line of their upper bodies in particular. Don't forget that blouses and shirts with red in them (this includes purples, blues, oranges, golds and blue-greens) will reflect up into the face in a more flattering way than pure greens and yellows. In the end, however, wear what you look good and feel good in. But by all means, DO NOT WEAR BLACK – especially from the waist up. Remember, black is used in the theatre to make things disappear!

3. Remember that the SETC auditions are typically held in a large convention-hotel ballroom; if you "shorten" yourself by sitting, kneeling, lying down, whispering, etc. on stage during your audition, you may diminish your effect in that large space. So if you use a chair, for example, try to use it as a springboard for action and don't end the material in it – end standing up. It is safe to assume that most Adjudicators and casting directors want to see how you move through space.

4. Personal and professional comportment is a key element in the adjudication -- if you exhibit a poor attitude or irritation toward the Adjudicators, accompanist or other actors, it will most probably be noticed. Stay calm, pleasant and patient if something goes wrong. At the same time, never apologize for yourself or your audition. Something that has gone wrong for you may not have been noticed by others. Make everyone feel you nailed the audition even if you personally don't think you did.

5. In singing, "acting through the lyric" is all too often ignored. You will stand out and be in a favorably-received minority if you are acting as well as singing effectively in your song. You may want to think about approaching the lyric as a short monologue, implementing specific and cogent emotional moments in marrying confident vocal production with interesting acting choices. This, of course, will also dictate specific movement that will cut against the typical and amateurish gestures that are irrelevant to the emotional world of the character.

6. If successfully screened, remember that you are required to present the same material at SETC that you presented at the state level unless the Adjudicators indicate differently.

### **A Final Note About Your Personal Attitude**

You must show everyone how much you love acting, working, and auditioning. If it is apparent that you're not enjoying what you're doing, if it looks like you are laboring through your work, why would casting directors call you back?

Also, you cannot possibly demonstrate the entire range or every color of your acting ability in 60-90 seconds. The Adjudicators know this. Putting pressure on yourself to do your personal best creates a healthy focus for your audition; putting pressure on yourself by trying to appease your assumptions of exactly what the Adjudicators or casting directors are looking for could create unnecessary tension in your acting instrument. The resulting tension will almost always impede your work.

Although there are consistent guidelines for everyone to follow, they will be interpreted slightly differently according to each Adjudicator. As an actor, you cannot possibly appease everyone in the audience. So -- do the work for yourself, on your own terms, and enjoy the short time you have to do what you love doing.

**YOUR MATERIAL AND PRESENTATION ARE A REFLECTION OF YOUR TASTE.**